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18-MONTH SURVEY FINDS U.S. FORCES LACKING READINESS

Pentagon Says Congressional
Study Highlights Faults It
Is Moving to Correct

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WASHINGTON, July 21 — A comprehensive Congressional survey has concluded that the military's readiness to fight is declining and that American forces could not sustain combat against the Soviet Union or many lesser powers.

A 376-page report drawn from the 18-month inquiry appeared to be the most sweeping public indictment of readiness in the armed forces since the issue was raised by members of Congress, mostly Democrats, in hearings on the military budget last winter.

"The United States Army cannot be sustained in combat for any extended period of time," the report said. It questioned the Navy's ability "to sustain full combat air and surface operations for more than a week's time." And the Air Force, the investigators concluded, "is not capable of conducting sustained conventional war operations against the Soviets."

'Well-Recognized Deficiencies'

The examination was conducted by the investigative staff of the House Appropriations Committee, which is controlled by Democrats. But their work was reviewed by aides to Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, and in a response published as part of the report, the Pentagon said, "Most of the data on which the staff conclusions were drawn, while not specifically verified, appear accurate."

The Pentagon's response also said the study "highlights longstanding and well-recognized deficiencies which this Administration inherited and has moved vigorously to correct."

The report on the inquiry, which ended late last year, was made public as part of the committee's hearing record.

Calling the Navy's readiness to defeat the Soviet Navy "seriously degraded," the report said that even the navies of Soviet allies and third world forces, "while not capable of defeating the United States Navy, could inflict damage tantamount to a national disgrace."

In its final assessment, the report said, "While combat forces are capable of initiating a response, the forces do not have the war reserve materiel and the combat service support to sustain wartime operations."

"Shortages in aircraft and equipment spare parts, personnel, fuel storage capacity, casualty care, communications and munitions continue as severe limitations in the capability to sustain war against Soviet forces," the report said.

Readiness has general and specific meanings that were used interchangeably in the report, as they often are in military parlance.

In its widest sense, readiness measures the capability of the forces to go to war, to wage a long fight and to win. Specifically, readiness gauges the preparation of the forces for the first day of a war, while sustaining forces in combat refers to the ability to continue a battle for a long time.

The inquiry said the readiness of American conventional forces had "experienced some deterioration" since the investigation began in 1982. "This deterioration has an increased significance in view of the positive expectations for improvement expressed by senior military officials during the initial investigation."

Many Details Deleted

The report's conclusions are also at odds with assessments of Administration officials who have repeatedly asserted that the armed forces are far more ready and capable than they were when President Reagan took office in 1981.

Many of the details in the report, once classified as secret, have been deleted in the published version. But conclusions have been flatly and openly stated.

The investigators spent a year questioning military commanders in Washington, in bases throughout the United States and at foreign posts. They wrote a basic report in March 1983, then went back to many of the same posts for further queries and wrote a final report in September.

Many Individual Examples

In addition to an overall assessment, the report made these disclosures:

¶The airfield from which Navy planes operate in Iceland "has been visited by Admiral Gorshkov, Chief of the Soviet Navy, and is used regularly by 'commercial aircraft' from Warsaw Pact nations."

¶The Atlantic Command, with headquarters in Norfolk, Va., reported as early as November 1982 that "Cuba is building an airfield at Salinas in Grenada." President Reagan ordered an invasion of Grenada in October 1983, in part to remove the Cuban presence.

¶Chaff, metal flakes scattered to deceive radar or homing devices, was "given to the British for use in the Falklands and led to deficiencies in training" of United States naval forces along the Pacific Coast.

¶The "85,000 North Korean seaborne commandos are a concern to the Marine Corps," which has 20,000 marines stationed on the Japanese island of Okinawa, not far from South Korea.

Widespread Shortcomings

The report said "serious shortcomings are found which encompass the entire spectrum of United States combat service support" for a conflict in Western Europe. Units assigned to the Rapid Deployment Force, now called the Central Command, "all indicated serious readiness problems."

In the event of hostilities elsewhere, "United States forces in Korea will have to sink or swim on their own," the report said. Similarly, Army forces in Panama or Alaska "cannot be reinforced or supported" in the event of a war in Europe.

The investigators said that the Army had received substantial increases in operations and maintenance funds in recent years but that "these increases have not demonstrably improved the readiness of the existing force." Spare parts, it said, "are not available."

It said the Army had calculated it would need \$164.6 billion to buy weapons and equipment needed to fulfill assigned missions and to stockpile ammunition and supplies to sustain combat for 180 days. After that, industry should be able to produce arms and munitions.

Billions Held Needed

Beyond that, the report said, the Army, which has 16 divisions now, held that it "needed a 45-division force to win" a conflict involving the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "In today's dollars, based on today's equipped force, this would cost between \$89.8 billion and \$142.3 billion."

Through the report ran concern over Soviet chemical weapons, which intelligence analysts here say Soviet forces have used in Afghanistan. "There is not a single United States Navy ship afloat that can effectively deal with such attacks," the report said.

The Navy, according to the report, was cautioned along with the other services by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1982 not to favor programs to modernize and expand the Navy at the expense of perpetuating past neglect of readiness.